

Dyslexia Licensing Advisory Committee

Good afternoon to the interim advisory committee members. My name is Dr. Terri Zerfas. I am a Certified Academic Language Therapist and a Qualified Instructor at the Learning Therapy Center at Southern Methodist University. I am also a licensed speech/language pathologist and registered professional educational diagnostician. I served students in the Texas public schools for over 30 years prior to teaching at SMU. I am here today to address issues of higher education and public education in relation to the dyslexia therapist and dyslexia practitioner licensing program. One role of higher education is to prepare preservice teachers who can competently provide appropriate reading instruction as defined by the 2000 National Reading Panel and to align preservice preparation with the literacy goals outlined in No Child Left Behind, Response to Intervention, the Texas dyslexia procedures, the Texas State Board of Education, and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The literacy goal takes on great magnitude in light of current research that clearly demonstrates the benefits of early, intensive intervention on the neural functions for reading in individuals at-risk for dyslexia and related disorders. This is one of the most exciting results of recent educational research. However, there exists a disturbing gap between the identified instructional needs of students with dyslexia compared to our teachers' knowledge base about the structure of the English language. As the parent of a child with dyslexia, this last point is the most crucial and will be the focus of my testimony.

A review of teacher training in Texas universities revealed that seven currently provide credit hours for dyslexia training (see attached). Those seven universities include Dallas Baptist University, Midwestern State University, Southern Methodist University, Texas Tech University, Texas Woman's University, the University of North Texas, and the University of St. Thomas-Houston. Credit hours range from 22 at SMU to 6 at the University of St. Thomas – Houston with an average of 12 credit hours during a two year training program. Each of these training programs is accredited by the International Multisensory Language Education Counsel (IMSLEC). The training centers in Texas provide a pool of Certified Academic Language Therapists that serve students with dyslexia in our public schools, as well as in private schools or private practice. It is the private practice dyslexia therapists that are available to serve individuals with dyslexia who attend private schools, have not received services in public schools, or have already graduated from high school.

There are currently nineteen universities that offer degrees in speech/language pathology, which is the profession that addresses the oral language needs of students. It is reasonable that university academic language therapy training programs will see similar growth in the coming years. This will be necessary to meet the demands of a growing public school population, in which approximately 10-15% of the students will be at-risk for dyslexia, a disorder that impacts written language. It will be of great importance to ensure that students at risk for dyslexia and related disorders have equal opportunity for therapeutic intervention regardless of geographic location, native language, culture, or ethnicity. Yet current research has clearly demonstrated higher education has not completely aligned preservice teacher preparation with scientifically research based literacy

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instruction. In the attached reference list, you will find research detailing where the gaps continue to exist.

The lack of scientifically based literacy instruction centers around three specific areas. First, many college instructors simply lack knowledge about the structure of the English language. In one study, less than 70% of university reading professors could correctly identify syllable types, recognize the definition of phonemic awareness, or recognize the definition of a morpheme – all vital pieces of information in literacy instruction. Another study found that university literacy professors had difficulty with the orthographic rules in English that govern the use of the letters ‘c’ and ‘k’ in spelling words that have the hard (k) sound. The English language is 85% decodable and all reading professors deserve access to this knowledge. I do not lay blame on the professors because their own literacy training was lacking. I have personally witnessed the willingness of university reading professors to gain this knowledge in order to train their respective preservice teachers. Approximately, one year ago, several Qualified Instructors from SMU held a two-day conference for university professors throughout Texas who were interested in obtaining additional knowledge about literacy and the most effective methods for teaching literacy. This conference was sponsored by the San Marcos Foundation in cooperation with the Higher Education Collaborative (HEC). Feedback from these professors was overwhelmingly positive. I hope that other training centers in Texas have had similar experiences with their own affiliated universities.

A second issue that interferes with the training of preservice and inservice teachers is the lack of available textbooks that adequately cover the phonological and orthographic codes of our complex English language. A 2009 study by Joshi and colleagues found that college literacy textbooks contained either inadequate or inaccurate information on literacy development, the structure of English, and methodology for teaching literacy. There was minimal print addressing phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency because most of the content was devoted to vocabulary and comprehension. Ignoring the foundational skills of reading is a disservice not only to the reading professors but also to the preservice teachers. The bottom line is that inadequate or inaccurate literacy textbooks interfere with the ability of university professors and preservice teachers to gain competence in literacy instruction.

A final interference to the literacy competence in preservice teachers is directly a result of the first two issues discussed. Because university reading professors lack an in-depth knowledge of the structure of English and because literacy textbooks are inadequate or incorrect in the information about the structure of English, many, if not most, university professors do not teach foundational basic skills (phonemic awareness and phonics). Some attention is given to the important skill of reading fluency; however, most do not make the connection between fluency and basic decoding. The unfortunate outcome was described by Louisa Moats and Barbara Foorman (2003) in reviewing the current literature. They concluded that teachers’ knowledge of phonology and orthography is too underdeveloped to allow explicit teaching of reading and writing.

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In closing, I am optimistic about the future of dyslexia therapy in Texas. From a public school perspective, I believe we will continue to refine the RTI process and improve our literacy knowledge so that those students at risk for dyslexia and its related disorders will have access to research based literacy instruction as described in the state's dyslexia procedures handbook. I am aware that change in higher education can be challenging; however, this committee's support for research based literacy instruction can move us closer to a reality in which all university literacy professors thoroughly understand the structure of the English language. It will then follow that more preservice teachers will benefit from this literacy knowledge. From the perspective of a private dyslexia therapist, this licensing program will provide protection to Texas consumers seeking competent professionals to remediate disorders of written language. From the perspective of a parent with a grown child who has dyslexia, I thank you for your time today.

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Training Center	Teaching	Therapy	University	Credit Hours
Literacy Education & Academic Development Inc.	2001 Accredited 2006 Reaccredited	1998 Accredited 2006 Reaccredited	Texas Woman's University	9/Certificate Program
Neuhaus Education Center	1999 Accredited 2007 Reaffirmation	1999 Accredited 2007 Reaffirmation	Southern Methodist University	12/M.Ed. Reading & Writing
			University of St. Thomas	6/Certificate Program
Scottish Rite Learning Center of Austin	NA	2002 Accredited	Midwestern State University	15/M.Ed. Special Education
Scottish Rite Learning Center of West Texas	NA	2007 Reaccredited	Texas Tech University	
Shelton Academic Language Approach (SALA)	2008 Accredited	2008 Accredited	Dallas Baptist University	
Shelton Adolescent Reading Approach (SARA)	2008 Accredited	2008 Accredited	Dallas Baptist University	
Shelton MSL Training	1999 Accredited 2002 Reaffirmation 2007 Reaccredited	1999 Accredited 2002 Reaffirmation 2007 Reaccredited	Dallas Baptist University	
Learning Therapy Center/Plano	2006 Accredited	2003 Accredited	Southern Methodist University	22/Certificate Program
				12/M.Ed. Reading & Writing
Learning Therapy Satellite/Valley	Same as LTC/Plano	Same as LTC/Plano	Southern Methodist University	22/Certificate Program
Southwest Multisensory Training Center	NA	1999 Accredited 2002 Reaffirmation	University of North Texas	
Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children	NA	2001 Accredited 2004 Reaffirmation	Midwestern State University	12 hours